

## Swine Manager of the Year

Dustin Bakke

A good barn manager is key in a business where leadership and employees can be the difference between success and failure. Compart's Boar Store was lucky to have one young man with an interest in pigs come to them looking to work. This turned into a long career and much success for Compart's and this year's Swine Manager of the Year, Dustin Bakke.

For Bakke, it was actually the National FFA Organization that helped him first get started in the pig business, nearly 30 years ago.

"I bought my first feeder pigs in FFA with my supervised agricultural experience program," Bakke said. "I wanted to buy a sow, but a neighbor told me to start with some feeder pigs, which was probably good advice because I had no idea what I was doing at the time!"

"I bought my first 12 feeder pigs and put them on a friend's farm because I lived in town," Bakke said. "It went really well with 12 pigs. So the next year I bought 60 and lost everything I made with the other ones and then some. That's when I decided to work for somebody else."

Bakke started working for Compart's in 1991. Bakke remembers going and knocking on the Compart's door when Bonnie answered and told him they could put him to work. Chris Compart noticed Bakke's interest in pigs grow quickly and his love for swine production became obvious.

Chris Compart said, "As a teenager, Dustin showed us he was very coachable, eager to learn, and soon excelled in each task with breeding, gestating, farrowing and finishing pigs. He took a keen interest in genetics and pedigrees and helped us grow our business in purebred boars and gilts."

"I started at the Nicollet farm as a barn sprayer, and over the years did more and more. Then the Princeton Farm spot became available and I was interested in going up there," Bakke said.

"Dustin moved up the ranks to manage our breeding herd at the Nicollet location, then our Primary SPF farm at Princeton, and today manages a nucleus breeding herd of 650 sows near Foley," Compart said.

In 1997, Bakke became the manager for the Primary SPF (Specific Pathogen Free) sow farm near Princeton while also having corn acres to manage. The unit flourished under Bakke's care according to Compart.

In 2013, Compart's needed to move a nucleus herd and found a facility to lease in Wisconsin. Bakke agreed to manage that farm in the interim as Compart's acquired and remodeled a barn for three and a half years.

"In February 2017, we finally got the Foley site finished and moved the sows from Wisconsin to this site," Bakke said. "At the same time, we doubled from 350 to 650 sows."

While Bakke has managed different sow farms, his interest in breeding purebred livestock remains the same. He attributes his interest and knowledge to his early experiences working for and learning from Dean, Jim and Chris Compart. Now he's moved into a role of making breeding decisions for the farm he

manages.

“I really like the purebred part of it: selection, looking at other boars, making breeding decisions, and making pigs better. It’s fun and challenging,” Bakke said. “There are changes you can make through the years. When we had to make pigs lean in the 80’s, we used boars that were probably too lean and not structurally sound. Now we’ve put more structure into them, heavier boned and heavier muscled pigs. I kind of like the way you can change pigs through selection.”

On a farm with every stage of pig, Bakke likes seeing the improvements made over time. The farm has also used some frozen semen to bring back older lines and get a bigger genetic base. Bakke said, “It’s different but it’s been kind of fun to see what happens with those lines.”

Developing an eye for pigs and using the genetic information continues to add value for Bakke. He attributes his success to using both genetic records and the phenotypic make up of pigs for breeding success.

Bakke is also responsible for a full-time employee, and two part-time employees who work during farrowing and breeding times. Because this farm farrows every 28 days, the first two weeks are particularly busy, while the next two are a bit slower. Managing employees and taking care of the other farm responsibilities presents its own unique challenges.

“Finding help can be difficult,” Bakke said. “You try to find good people who will show up and do a good job. Sometimes the best candidates don’t know anything about pigs, so you have to start from ground zero and teach them.”

Upon learning he would be recognized as the 2018 Swine Manager of the Year, Bakke was surprised and honored. He said, “I don’t feel like I do anything special. This is my job. I just try to raise as many good, healthy pigs as I can.”

“For over 25 years, Dustin has been a valuable part of our operation and has helped us grow,” Compart said. “He started as a teenager with little hog experience. Now we trust him with our genetic base. He is a honest, loyal, hardworking person with a passion for hogs. We are grateful to have him as part of our team.”